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TIME IS RUNNING OUT!

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*Why Should I Care?
I Don't Even Own
A Computer!*



But.....





Do you own a cell phone? Field irrigation equipment that follows a set pattern for watering? Home appliances that depend on an electronic calendar to make them work? Do you drive a tractor? A combine? Earth-moving equipment?

Do you enter elevators and expect them to take you to another floor? Do you depend on traffic lights and railroad-crossing barriers to keep you and your loved ones safe? Would you fly if you thought the plane's navigation system might not be working or that air traffic controllers couldn't communicate? If the machinery in the plant where you work suddenly fell silent and refused to start again, would you still have a job?

And do you shop in a grocery store? Where would the groceries come from if trucks and trains were gridlocked on highways and tracks? How could stores order food from warehouses and wholesalers? How would scanners and cash registers work?

Newspapers and television broadcasting depend on computers. How would you know what was going on in the world? Would TV screens be dark, with VCR's sitting idle, blinking 12:00—12:00—12:00?

Could you and your family cook and stay warm if there were no gas service or electricity? What would happen to your home's water and plumbing if there were no heat? How would you keep your food from spoiling? Would ice cream become a winter-only treat?

WHAT IS Y2K, ANYWAY, AND WHY SHOULD I WORRY?

Y2K is not a little silver robot or a comet hurtling toward Earth. It's a shortening of the phrase "year 2000," and it is our approaching entry into the year 2000 that is causing concern. Many of the world's computers using two digits (the two indicating the year) to keep track of data stored in the computer's memory will click over to a double zero on January 1 of the new century.

So all of a sudden, while we move into the year 2000, some computers will jump back to the year 1900. Software and an operating system are what make computers do everything we've come to depend on them to do. If your computer's clock/calendar has not been set for the century change, the software won't work, and your computer might just sit there with a blank screen and a "do-nothing attitude."

The Y2K problem could affect all kinds of computer functions—from running our Nation's defense system to keeping those precious family recipes. From providing railroad signals to maintaining hospital records. From keeping track of Social Security numbers and checks to the simple action of sending or receiving mail. From making satellites stay on course to proving that you actually have money in the bank. The devices and services we count on to help us survive in today's world are almost all computer dependent. Computer experts warn that if the computers are not adjusted, the person who takes an elevator, defrosts food in a microwave, boards an airplane, tries to get cash from an automatic teller machine, or uses technology in any one of hundreds of forms we have come to take for granted may encounter problems on the first day of the year 2000.

WHAT'S A "CHIP," AND WHERE IS IT "EMBEDDED"?

Some common appliances, machines, and tools may contain tiny electronic parts called chips. These chips, sometimes smaller than a child's thumbnail, contain information that tells these objects when and how to perform and are embedded within many of the things we use every day. Chips are programmed at the factory, and unless they are checked and, if necessary, adjusted, they could stop working after the clock strikes midnight on December 31, 1999.

HOW CAN I TELL WHETHER THINGS I OWN CONTAIN SMALL COMPUTERS OR EMBEDDED CHIPS?

The truth is, most people can't tell. But there is a chance that products that require some kind of time-tracking to make them work might have a small computer or chip that could affect performance. The manufacturers of the products you own and use should be able to tell you if their products will still function without adjusting for Y2K.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Above all else, *educate and inform yourself!* If you don't own a personal computer (PC), and don't feel you can afford one, it's probably not a good time to buy one at a yard sale. Instead, go to the library or any commercial establishment that has public

access to computers and the Internet, and get on the World Wide Web. On the back of this brochure is a list of websites that will help inform and educate you about the Y2K problem. If you've never "surfed the web," ask someone to show you how. It's pretty easy! And you'll get the most up-to-date information available anywhere because experts are still discovering and reporting potential problems while they search for solutions to Y2K problems. This information can help you decide which devices to worry about and which will be least likely to be affected.

After you've gathered information, inventory your home for personal products that have timing involved in their operation, and write to each manufacturer. Ask the companies to tell you *in writing* whether your appliances or farm machinery or vehicles contain embedded chips or small computers, and what they propose to do for owners to adjust for the Y2K problem.

If companies are slow to respond, call them and suggest ways they might keep customers informed of their progress toward making their products Y2K compliant, such as establishing a web page. For devices or services over which you have no control, such as traffic lights and elevators or electrical power and natural gas services, find and question the people responsible for providing everyday comfort and safety. Ask if they are prepared or are preparing to reach Y2K compliance on time. Do they have an action plan? Is it in place? What is their timetable? What stage are they in now? Are they meeting deadlines? How are they keeping customers informed? Have they established a web page? What will they do for users or customers should their companies fail to reach compliance on time?

HOW CAN I GET OTHERS TO HELP?

It will be difficult to make all these contacts by yourself. Share your information with other concerned people in your community, and invite them to take their concerns to manufacturers, State and local government officials, essential retailers such as grocery stores and gasoline companies, and commercial providers such as electrical power and gas companies. Encourage other consumers to document the level of awareness shown by the key players in your community. Decisionmakers must take the Y2K problem seriously. They must be alerted and convinced that *now* is the time to take action.

The technical "fix" for the Y2K problem is straightforward. However, the technology's use and its dependence on outside computer system linkages can complicate the problem and cost precious time. Doing nothing will cost far more than correcting the problem.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ON THE YEAR 2000 PROBLEM?

Some of the best Y2K information is available on the World Wide Web. The President's Council on the Year 2000 recommends the year 2000 pages of the Federal Government's Chief Information Officers Council Committee on Year 2000:
<http://www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/mks/yr2000/y2khome.htm>.

This site is building Y2K information linked to U.S. economic sectors. The President's Council also recommends the Small Business Administration (<http://www.sba.gov/y2k>) site. Industry trade associations are another source of Y2K information.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) home page (<http://www.usda.gov>) provides frequent updates (select the "Y2K" button) on Y2K activities as well as a variety of Y2K information sources, including:

USDA Year 2000 Program Office, USDA Office of the Chief Information Officer

(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/y2k/index.htm>).

President's Council on Year 2000 Food Supply Working Group

(<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/y2k>).

USDA National Information Technology Center

(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/nitc/y2k/index.html>).

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

(<http://www.itc.nrcs.usda.gov/y2k/y2k.htm>).

USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

(<http://www.reeusda.gov/y2k>).

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